

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESSB 5909

As Passed Senate, March 13, 2007

Title: An act relating to supporting the needs of children who have been in foster care.

Brief Description: Supporting the needs of children who have been in foster care.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Human Services & Corrections (originally sponsored by Senators Rasmussen, Roach, Regala, Eide, McAuliffe, Kilmer, Hargrove, Kastama, Tom, Shin, Kohl-Welles, Stevens, Carrell, Franklin and Kline).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 2/13/07, 2/23/07 [DPS].
Passed Senate: 3/13/07, 47-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5909 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Hargrove, Chair; Regala, Vice Chair; Stevens, Ranking Minority Member; Brandland, Carrell, Marr and McAuliffe.

Staff: Jennifer Strus (786-7316)

Background: State law grants the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) the authority to provide independent living services to young people who have been in foster care up to the age of 21. "Independent living services" include assistance in achieving basic educational requirements such as a graduate equivalency degree, enrollment in vocational and technical training programs offered at the community and vocational colleges; obtaining and maintaining employment; and accomplishing basic life skills such as money management, nutrition, preparing meals, and cleaning house.

In 2005, the Legislature created an endowed scholarship program for financially needy foster care youth and former foster care youth. The same year, the Legislature authorized the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED) to create an Individual Development Account (IDA) program for low-income persons and foster youth. The IDA program was designed to encourage savings for such purposes as funding post-secondary education or job training, purchasing a primary residence, capitalizing a small business, or purchasing a car or computer. The CTED was authorized to set up a government match of up to \$4 for every dollar contributed by the foster youth or low-income person to an IDA, up to \$4,000.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

In 2006, the Legislature established a program for up to 50 foster youth reaching 18 per year, for a period of three years, to continue in foster care or group care, as needed, while they participate in a post-high school academic program or vocational program and to receive necessary support and transition services.

Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill: The Family Policy Council is required to review programs that provide services to adolescent foster children, and to youth who have reached the age of 18 and are no longer required to live in the care of foster parents. After the Family Policy Council completes its program review, the DSHS may set up the pilot program stationing a foster youth community coordinator in three regional office locations in the state. The purpose of the pilot program is to prepare foster youth reaching 18 years of age to live independently once they leave the state's care.

Up to 50 youth may continue in foster care or group care for up to six months after age 18 in order to receive independent living skills.

With funds specifically appropriated therefor, the DSHS may work with youth exiting foster care to develop an independent living plan that may include assistance with a month's rent, security deposit, and incidental items to live independently. The assistance must be for no more than \$2,000 per youth and must be provided through vouchers, rather than cash assistance.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill: PRO: In the Pierce County area, 75 different resources, in the areas of mentorship, recreational activities, education, mental health, and substance abuse, have been identified that could help kids aging out of foster care. Unfortunately, social workers don't necessarily have the time to connect kids with these resources. That is why the foster care coordinators set up in the bill are needed.

The savings accounts set up by the bill would help children aging out of foster care to be more successful and to avoid going on public assistance.

The 180 days of continued foster care under a voluntary placement agreement would allow kids to return to foster care to focus on education, even if they have gone out on their own and made their own mistakes after leaving care.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Steve Woolworth, Helen Myrick, Greater Pierce County Community Network; Debbie Lewis, Alliance for Youth of Pierce County; Stephanie Burbach, Ria J. Johnson, Greater Pierce County Community Network; Ashley Pfonerstiell, Arianna Collins, foster youth; Dallas Dixon, former foster youth; Laura Porter, Family Policy Council; Joseph LeRoy, citizen.